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The information in this brief comes from research carried out by ZAMISE, UNZA faculty and graduate students in partnership with the Ministry of General Education (MOGE) and Strengthening Educational Performance Up (STEP-Up) Zambia, a USAID-funded project designed to improve education management and raise academic achievement at the primary level. It is based on questionnaires administered in early 2015 with 135 District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) officers from 30 districts (3 per province), 44 Provincial Education Office (PEO) officers from all 10 provinces, and 11 officers from national level (HQ).

School Management, Monitoring, and Policy – Focus on Learning

The education sector strategic plan called the National Implementation Framework III (NIF III 2011-2015) aspires to enhance decentralization and improve school management systems by strengthening processes and capacity for standards monitoring, inspection, teacher performance monitoring and effective leadership. The implementation framework also seeks to conduct training at all levels of the system on policy, planning and management of education. This policy brief summarizes the findings of research into policy and management strategies that MOGE staff see as priority to improve early grade literacy.

In the 2015 study of effective strategies to improve pupil learning, particularly in terms of reading within the educational system in Zambia school management was a key theme for investigation for education officers at DEBS, PEO and Headquarters levels. MOGE officers identified that communication, feedback and sharing of ideas is needed to support policies and support for schools, teachers, all toward improving pupils' learning.

The current strategy may only partially address the needs of the system since most education administrators (DEBS, PEO and headquarters levels) emphasized further decentralization than the overall approach indicated in the NIF III. Findings revealed that education officers need to do more to:

1. Monitor performance, not just the verification or review of management records
2. Involve all levels in the formulation of policy and guidelines (further decentralize), and
3. Strengthen school based management and incentives or rewards for good performance

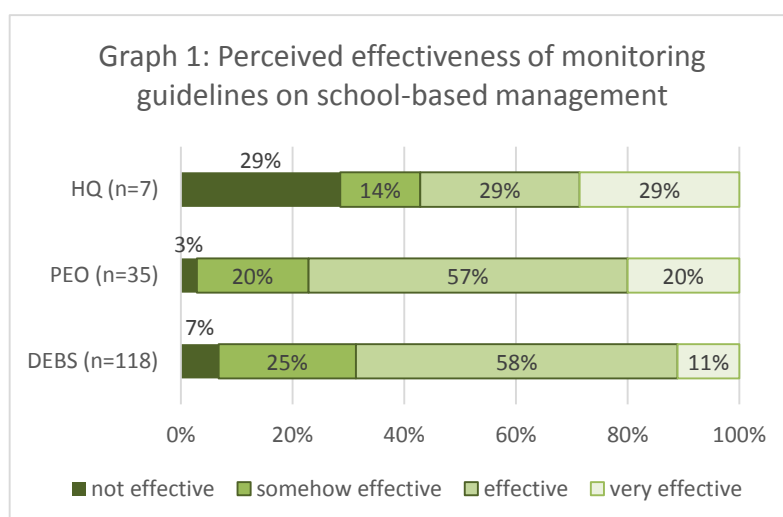
Finding 1: Monitoring records versus performance and using guidelines

National and school management, monitoring, and policy implementation is critical in quality education delivery at all levels of the education system. Study results established that DEBS, PEO and headquarters staff tends to monitor schools termly and that, they are using guidelines to track school management records. Respondents suggested that the monitoring guidelines have average effectiveness

- The administrators in this study overwhelmingly (DEBS 82%, PEO 81%, and headquarters 71%) had access to national-based management guidelines on monitoring. Within the national guidelines, they use monitoring instruments to track record keeping and schemes of work, with some attention to: methodology and lesson preparation, assessment strategies, content, and the need for management training and CPD.



- Some participants said that they develop their own monitoring instruments drawn from the standardized guidelines such as SIMON, and the national guidelines from HQ.
- The officers in the study suggested that the guidelines allow monitors to collect information on school records and standards, seemingly to the expense of assessment, methodology and capacity building. Evidence of this lack of attention on teaching and learning came from qualitative data from open ended questions. Only half of DEBS officers and one third of PEO officers mentioned monitoring teacher delivery methods. Similarly, pupil assessments were mentioned by almost half of PEO officers and slightly over one third of DEBS officers. More attention on teaching and assessment as the core of teaching and learning is needed.
- It is noted that the frequency of monitoring was done termly by DEBS (67%) and PEO (55%), and headquarters (75%). Monitoring visits also seem to focus primarily on school records, not necessarily feedback and a two-way conversation given comments from administrators.
- DEBS serves as the primary channel for feedback from school managers since 59% indicated they receive feedback termly and 27% monthly, while PEOs get feedback from school managers less frequently (44% termly, 18% monthly). It could be that the DEBS officers are intended to pass on feedback to the other levels.
- In general, the study shows that officers perceive average effectiveness of the guidelines on school based management, see graph 1 for details. Though the reasons for this perception are unclear, it appears that those in headquarters have the most varied and extreme views, which suggests that either sensitization, revision or both may be needed for the guidelines.



Overall, these findings suggest that monitoring record keeping is being done but could be further decentralized by getting feedback from school managers and focusing more on teacher performance and support and pupil assessment. Teacher delivery methods impact on quality education whilst assessment gives feedback on general performance of the teacher and learner and advises for further action. Possible revision or sensitization on the guidelines could therefore focus on teaching methods, support (e.g. CPD, feedback), and pupil assessment.

Finding 2: Involvement in the formulation and implementation of policy

The study asked DEBS, PEO, and Headquarter administrators about their views of the policy formulation and implementation process. The findings suggest that the participants believe policy formulation is primarily the responsibility of Ministry Headquarters (HQ), despite several comments indicating that local decision making and strategic planning is also occurring in some cases.

- One out of the seven respondents at HQ had the view that DEBS should take part in formulation of policy.
- PEO administrators viewed their roles as intermediaries.
- DEBS officers most often indicated that they have an advisory role in formulating or interpreting policy to the local level (43%) or they merely distribute the policies to

PEO role: “*participate in the policy formulation at national level and also translate guidelines to suit the local situation.*”
– PEO respondent

the schools (43%). DEBS officers also indicate they monitor policy compliance (11%), integrate policies into plans and implementation (11%) or even have no role in policy (6%). Most DEBS officers indicated that they should have a role in policy formulation and implementation, particularly in terms of providing feedback from the local level to PEO and HQ levels as well as interpretation to the local level.

These findings suggest that policy formulation—and to a certain extent implementation— continues to follow a highly centralized structure. The administrators at lower levels tend to see their role in the system as interpreters and people to give feedback, but there is not an established or known route for feedback to help spread ideas and improve service delivery.

Finding 3: Strategies to Improve Effectiveness of School-Based Management

Strategies perceived to improve school management often focused on training with varied approaches. School based management rewards and strategies indicated to improve school based management were varied. A common theme was to have greater local decision making, planning and action, along with sharing across schools at all levels, particularly in the zone and district.

- The study revealed that there were several strategies used to enhance effectiveness of school-based management often starting with the capacity building of school managers and teachers as illustrated in the quotation from a DEBS officer about empowering and enforcing training lessons for school based managers. Notably, DEBS and PEO officers recommended a combination of reward systems and punitive structures for monitoring, training, and management.
- DEBS and PEO officers also emphasized involvement of teachers and the community in decisions, sharing ideas across schools, improved and more focused monitoring on school management attentive to teacher and pupil performance and support. This suggestion to have a local strategic planning process confirms the STEP-Up Zambia model to development of local strategic plans to improve school based management.

88% of DEBS officers (n=107), 68% of PEO officers (n=37), and two out of five PEO officers (40%) indicated they have a rewards system for education managers. The type of reward provided varied. DEBS and PEO officers indicated that the most frequent type of reward was a commendation letter, followed by a promotion, prize, verbal praise and occasionally a monetary reward. PEO officers indicated they seldom give rewards to school managers. DEBS indicated promotion and verbal praise as reward strategies they use slightly more than PEO officers.

The effectiveness of school based management, at least in reflection of the officers in this study, suggests that MOGE officers appreciate training in school based management. Furthermore, they want more guidance on how to attend to school managers who are not performing well while rewarding, acknowledging and encouraging the spread of good ideas and strategies. Individuals who receive commendation letters, promotions or awards should be encouraged to share their innovations.

Empower the school managers with effective school management skills through training. Make it mandatory to expect improvement in learners and teachers' performance among other indicators of effective school management. Vigilantly monitor schools (even electronically) to ensure what is agreed upon at the training is not abandoned. Formulate a rating scale and educate school managers about it. Use its' results to reward or reprimand school managers. – DEBS officer

“Introduce education management committees where head teachers can meet and come up with strategies on how they can improve their management of schools” - A DEBS officer

“Encourage schools to interact so that they learn best practices which they can replicate” – PEO officer

“Team work” and “Improve communication” – Two DEBS

Policy Action Points

Monitoring using performance indicators

- Pupil and teacher performance indicators must be integrated with strategic plans and local priorities. Pupil learning and effective teaching should be the primary focus of all monitoring and subsequent support for those who are not performing. Monitoring reporting is not enough.
- Teachers should be monitored more often than termly. The proposed schedule needs to be revisited to make monitoring fortnightly or monthly to improve pupil learning and teacher support.

Supportive policies and practice to encourage school based management and innovation

- Improved feedback channels across the system (school, zone, DEBS, PEO and HQ) to ensure efficiency in the implementation of policies, including the development of local policies and guidelines. Those who are closest to the situations in the schools and communities and can provide feedback and strategies to inform and initiate a change process to higher levels of the system.
- Engage all levels in needs assessment and also conduct “*review workshops to look at the coverage and the effectiveness of the programs initiated,*” as both DEBS and PEO officers suggested.

Incentives for improved school-based management, rewards and awards

- Recognize improved management through incentives and awards at school, zone, district, provincial, and national levels. Devise specifications to define rewards at various levels to inspire officers to work towards priority goals. Furthermore, those who receive awards should share their experience and expertise with others.